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DAWN

Sunday
November 2, 2025
Jumadi-ul-Awwal 10, 1447

KARACHI

Rs 50.00
34 Pages
Vol. LXXIX No. 300
Regd. No. SS-022

www.dawn.com

Kh Asif points finger at India amid Kabul tensions

• Defence minister says New Delhi wants to keep Islamabad engaged on eastern, western fronts
• Says Pakistan has 'evidence' of India's role in terrorism • Hopes dialogue with Afghan Taliban will lead to 'reasonable conclusion'

Dawn Report

ISLAMABAD: While expressing the hope that ongoing talks with Afghanistan would reach a reasonable conclusion, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on Saturday said India wanted to keep Pakistan busy and engaged on the eastern and western fronts amid tensions with Kabul and New Delhi, Dawn.com reported.

Pakistan and Afghanistan earlier agreed during the extended Istanbul talks to continue a ceasefire, following a rapid deterioration of ties and a brief conflict along the border last month. The Istanbul agreement came after days of deadlock that nearly brought the process to a halt, with mediators pulling both delegations back to the table even as Pakistan's team had already begun preparations to return home.

On the eastern border, an uneasy peace persists between Pakistan and India after their May conflict that ended with a United States-brokered ceasefire. Since then, Indian political and military leadership, including chiefs of the military branches, have continued to make aggressive statements, reiterating terrorism allegations that Pakistan has repeatedly denied and also warning of "geographical changes" in the course of any future conflict.

The defence minister, while talking to *Geo News* on Saturday, said Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was "silenced" after the defeat dealt to India during the May conflict. He also expressed the hope that the ongoing talks with Afghanistan would reach a reasonable conclusion.

He reiterated the claim that India was waging a low-intensity war against Pakistan from Afghanistan, adding that New Delhi was trying to "settle the score" after facing defeat in May. He said, "If there is a need for evidence, then we have it, about what involvement India has in terrorism [in Pakistan] and how it wants to keep us busy on two fronts: the eastern and western."

However, in reference to the country's western neighbour, he made it clear that everyone was onboard — politicians, the establishment and the Pakistani nation — about the fact that an immediate solution to the Afghanistan issue was very necessary. "Terrorism from Afghan soil should be completely stopped," the defence minister said.

He said the preferable solution would be for both states to maintain a civilised relationship. The second round of negotiations with Afghanistan produced a three-point understanding — the continuation of the ceasefire, the establishment of a monitoring and verification mechanism to ensure peace, and penalties for violations.

October becomes deadliest month for militants in a decade: study — Page 3

Mujahid's remarks about deportation rejected

Separately, the information ministry rubbished remarks by Afghan Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid about details of a prisoner exchange scheme in the Istanbul talks.

As per *Ariana News*, he claimed Pakistan was informed in the talks that the Islamic Emirate was willing to deport people Islamabad considered a security threat but Pakistan did not accept the offer.

It added that he said that Pakistan requested the Afghan side to control such people within Afghanistan instead of deporting them.

Responding to the development, the information ministry said it "rejects deliberate twisting of facts" by Mujahid.

"Pakistan had demanded that terrorists in Afghanistan posing a threat to Pakistan be controlled or arrested. When the Afghan side said that they were Pakistani nationals, Pakistan immediately proposed that they be handed over through designated border posts, consistent with Pakistan's

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LARKANA: Children wave goodbye as they board a special train heading to Lahore on Saturday for attending the 556th birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Nanak Dev Ji in Nankana Sahib.—APP Report on Page 3

Ex-PTI men return empty-handed after surprise call on Qureshi

• Trio visited party vice chairman in hospital to seek his support for 'release Imran' campaign • Fawad says leading efforts to pave way for dialogue, get PTI chief released from jail

By Mansoor Malik

LAHORE: After PTI leader Shah Mahmood Qureshi was hospitalised in the provincial capital, three former PTI leaders arrived in his hospital room, ostensibly to convince the incarcerated party vice chairman to join their 'release Imran Khan campaign' — a move rebuffed by Mr Qureshi.

According to his lawyer Rana Mudassar Umer, former leaders Fawad Chaudhry, Imran Ismail, and Maulvi Mahmood managed to gain access to Mr Qureshi on Thursday when he was alone in his room.

"Shah Mahmood Qureshi was surprised to see them and immediately asked the police on duty to call his lawyer, who had left just a minute ago, and tell him some 'guests' had arrived," Rana Mudassar said, adding by the time he got back, the ex-PTI leaders had already gone. He said the visitors stayed only a little over 10 minutes and left without any political discussion with Mr Qureshi.

The unannounced visit came after one of the three leaders was reportedly denied permission to meet Mr Qureshi.

Sources said the former PTI leaders have also attempted to give the impression that another PTI leader, Asad Umar, was also on board with their decision to launch an outreach campaign for Mr Khan's release. Mr Umer, however, said he was not part of this group. He said he advised the trio against the hospital visit, as it would create friction in the party, while Mr Qureshi's family would also be disturbed.

"I am not part of this campaign…a group of politicians is trying to highlight," he told *Dawn*. The former PTI leader also clarified his stance in a tweet. "Though any effort for the release of Imran Khan and other jailed leaders is good, but I am not part of the newly launched 'Release Imran Khan' campaign," he said, adding that he learned from newspapers that he was a part of this campaign led by some former party leaders.

Paving way for dialogue

On the other hand, ex-PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry, in a video message, said they were trying to bring the political temperature down in the country and make the release of Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi possible, besides getting the right of bail for political prisoners acknowledged in the country.

He said they were trying to create an environment in which a dialogue could take place. "The political temperature can come down in the country only if the PTI takes one step back and the government takes a step forward." He claimed that he had also met Ejaz Chaudhry and other leaders and was happy that they too agreed that the political temperature should come down in the country. He said his group members would meet PML-N senior ministers as well as Maulana Fazlur Rehman.

Mr Qureshi's lawyer, however, termed the remarks by Fawad Chaudhry "deception" and said the former PTI leader did not even visit the incarcerated PTI leadership in the Kot Lakhpat jail, either on Thursday or

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Jordan and Germany say global force in Gaza needs UN mandate

MANAMA: Jordan and Germany said on Saturday that an international force expected to support a future Palestinian police in Gaza under US President Donald Trump's post-war governance plan should have a UN mandate.

Under the US-brokered ceasefire between Hamas and Israel, a coalition of mainly Arab and Muslim nations is expected to deploy forces in the Palestinian territory, which has been devastated by Israel's relentless bombing campaign.

The so-called international stabilisation force is supposed to train and support vetted Palestinian police in the Strip, with backing from Egypt and Jordan, as well as secure border areas and prevent weapons supply to Hamas.

Israel strikes Gaza, claims returned bodies 'not of prisoners': Page 12

"We all agree that in order for that stabilisation force to be able to be effective in getting the job done, it has to have a Security Council mandate," Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said.

Jordan, however, will not be sending its own forces to the Strip.

"We're too close to the issue and we cannot deploy troops in Gaza," Mr Safadi said, adding that his country was nonetheless ready to cooperate with the international force.

Mr Safadi was speaking at the IISS Manama Dialogue conference in Bahrain alongside his German counterpart Johann Wadephul, who also supported a UN mandate for the force, saying it would "need a clear basis in international law".

"We understand that this is of utmost importance to those countries who might be willing to send troops to Gaza and for the Palestinians. Germany would also want

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Stranded Afghans return via Torkham

By Ibrahim Shinwari

KHYBER: Hundreds of exhausted but overjoyed Afghan families gathered at the Torkham border on early Saturday morning, as the crossing reopened for their long-awaited but swift return after a 20-day closure.

Officials said that adequate arrangements had been made both at the immigration offices and at the exit-zero point to facilitate the return of stranded families, who had been impatiently waiting for the border to reopen since Oct 12.

They added that Afghan nationals holding temporary identity or registration cards, as well as those without any such documents, were allowed to return to their homeland.

However, Afghan nationals possessing valid visas in their passports were not permitted to go beyond the Michni check post. Officials said that the focus was on first easing the burden by sending back "illegal" aliens, while legal cross-border movement would be resumed at an appropriate time.

Local sources said that majority of the families which were stranded in Jamrud and Landi Kotal were deported from different parts of Punjab prior to the closure of border.

The local administration had arranged temporary

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ON OTHER PAGES

India temple stampede kills nine

At least nine people were crushed to death after a massive crowd surge at a Hindu temple in southern India's Andhra Pradesh on Saturday, the state's governor said. The stampede occurred at the Venkateswara temple in Kasibugga in Srikakulam district, where a crowd of devotees had gathered. The governor expressed his 'profound grief on the death of nine pilgrims in the stampede'. **Page 11**

Pakistan clinch series win over SA

Babar Azam showed his mastery with the bat after Shaheen Afridi led a sparkling bowling performance from Pakistan as the hosts cruised to a four-wicket victory over South Africa in the series-deciding third T20 International. Shaheen picked up 3-26 as South Africa were restricted to 139-9 after being put into bat before Babar made 68 to anchor a winning chase. **Page 18**

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Fisherman's arrest exposes new Indian plot: Tarar

Says Mallah coerced by agencies into carrying out espionage-related tasks

By Kalbe Ali

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information Attaullah Tarar on Saturday accused India of launching a fresh campaign of terrorism and misinformation against Pakistan after its "humiliating failure" in Operation Sindoor, as he announced the arrest of a Pakistani fisherman coerced by Indian intelligence agencies to work against his country.

Addressing a joint press conference with Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry, Mr Tarar said India, unable to confront Pakistan on the battlefield or at diplomatic forums, had resorted to "underhanded tactics" aimed at maligning Pakistan's image internationally.

He said that Pakistani intelligence agencies had arrested a fisherman, Ejaz Mallah, who was detained by Indian authorities while fishing in open waters and later forced to participate in a plot to create false evidence against Pakistan. "This arrest exposes India's latest malicious plan and proves its continuing attempts to destabilise and discredit Pakistan through deception," the minister said.

He said Mallah was detained by the Indian Coast Guard and handed over to Indian intelligence agencies, which coerced him into carrying out espionage-related tasks. The fisherman was instructed to obtain uniforms of Pakistan Army, Navy and Rangers, as well as SIM cards, Pakistani cigarettes, currency, and receipts — items intended to be used in a staged operation linking Pakistan to subversive activities.

The minister, who also showed pictures of items recovered from the fisherman, said Pakistan's intelligence agencies placed Mallah under surveillance after noticing suspicious behaviour and later apprehended him before he could act on these instructions. "The arrest provides concrete proof of India's covert and deceitful tactics," Mr Tarar added.

He highlighted that not only were the said items recovered, but the man's statement was "legally on record". He added that the government was placing the evidence before the entire world so that India's "nefarious designs could be exposed".

A recorded confessional statement by Ejaz Mallah was also played for the media, in which he said that he and several other fishermen were detained by Indian authorities while at sea. Mallah claimed he was told to carry out tasks for Indian agencies and released after agreeing to comply. He said he was later arrested by Pakistani security personnel when he returned to the sea.

Mr Tarar compared the case to that

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Silence is complicity

COMMENT

Ten of the 253 journalists killed in Gaza worked for *Al Jazeera*

By Dima Khatib

IT IS the largest massacre of journalists in human history. In Gaza, 253 Palestinian journalists and media workers have been killed since Oct 2023 — more than those killed in the wars of Afghanistan, Vietnam, the Balkans, World War I, and World War II combined.

Yet these killings remain mostly un-investigated, unpunished, and unacknowledged by those responsible — a stark example of the impunity that allows attacks on journalists to continue.

Ten of those 253 were my colleagues at *Al Jazeera Media Network*. I still miss the voice of my colleague, Anas Al Sharif, every morning from Gaza City _ reporting on the humanitarian situation, talking to people every day.

He was killed in a targeted attack on journalists near Al Shifa Hospital on Aug 10. He left behind a family who will forever be without a father, and a farewell letter that went viral — a heart-breaking tradition now common among Gaza's journalists, who leave their last words in hospitals to be delivered to loved ones after their death.

No other media organisation has ever lost so many journalists in such a short time, in any single conflict. These are reporters and camerapersons who have been working under inhuman conditions for a prolonged period: bombed, starved, displaced, hunted, and threatened. Their killings are not accidents of war but deliberate state policy — and the whole world is watching it live on their phones.

Heroic work

Their work should be celebrated as heroic.

Were it not for them, the world might never have known what has been happening in Gaza, since Israel allows no foreign journalists to enter unless embedded with the Israeli army and reporting under its scrutiny. It is still the case today, even after the ceasefire agreement is in place.

Journalists have been inheriting gear from each other. When one is killed, the next takes their vest and resumes their work — sometimes on the same day, reporting on the killing of their colleague while wearing that very vest. One particular vest is now being worn by a third journalist, after two were consecutively killed wearing it.

Unanswered murders : Editorial on Page 6

They know the risk they face, yet they continue — driven by duty to tell the world their people's stories, and by the conviction that their lives as Palestinians are already under threat, so they might as well use the time left to make a difference.

I remember our first loss in Gaza in Dec 2023: Samer Abu Daqqa. He was killed while documenting the aftermath of an airstrike. Wounded and trapped, he bled for hours as medics were blocked from reaching him.

We kept pleading with the world on all platforms to save him. We knew he was still alive.

When colleagues later recovered his camera, it was still recording — smoke and silence filling the final frame. His death turned Al Jazeera's newsroom into a mourning hall and sent a clear message: journalists in Gaza were now deliberate targets, exactly like on April 8, 2003, when our newsroom turned into a mourning hall as we lost our colleague Tarek Ayyoub, killed in a US air strike on Baghdad.

The aim is always the same: to silence the voice of the truth.

In Palestine this impunity had begun way before the genocide in Gaza — when my colleague and friend Shireen Abu Akleh was

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